

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 4:18 - 4:25



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 4:18-25, Jesus meets Andrew and Simon Peter while they were fishing and tells them to follow him, promising to make them "fishers of men." This story illustrates how seemingly unqualified individuals, like fishermen, can be called to serve in religious ministry. Jesus did not pay a salary to his disciples and they were allowed to continue their vocation while participating in his ministry. The crowds were drawn to Jesus because of his healing powers and he aimed to inspire people to hunger for God and to participate in the kingdom of God.

### Transcript

Let's turn now to Matthew chapter 4, beginning at verse 18. A few verses earlier than this, in verse 12, we read that Jesus began his public ministry by preaching that people should repent because the kingdom of heaven was, as he said, at hand. And now we find that Jesus begins to collect some disciples.

The first ones that are mentioned here are the four fishermen. And every Sunday school child is familiar with this story. It says, now Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers called Simon, called Peter, excuse me, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

And he said to them, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Then they immediately left their nets and followed him. And going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets.

And he called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father, and they followed him. Now, these four men actually knew Jesus already. It's interesting that Matthew doesn't let us on to that fact, and neither does Mark or Luke, when they record the calling of these four fishermen, they do not mention that these men knew Jesus.

Now, you might have deduced that they did, simply from their quick response, when Jesus simply came to these fishermen and said, follow me and I'll make you fishers of men. These men left their trade, they left their vocation, these were family men. They

had, Peter, for example, had a wife, and his mother-in-law lived with him, and may have had children.

And here's, these are men with responsible jobs and responsibilities of family, and they leave their vocation, just because some guy walks up and says, follow me and I'll make you fishers of men. Obviously, he was not just some guy to them. They knew he was more than some stranger walk up.

And here's how they knew. In the Gospel of John, we read of an earlier encounter that these men had with Jesus, possibly six months earlier or so. And this was at the other end of the country.

This calling of the four fishermen, of which we read in Matthew, occurred from the Sea of Galilee and Capernaum. But much earlier, Jesus had been at the other end of the country in Judea, and there John the Baptist had been baptizing. And there were some men who were followers of John the Baptist, who heard John when he commended Jesus publicly.

In John 1.35, it says, again the next day, John stood with two of his disciples, and looking at Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God. Two disciples heard him speak and followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, seeing them following, said to them, What do you seek? And they said to him, Rabbi, which is to say teacher, where are you staying? And he said to them, Come and see.

They came and saw where he was staying and remained with him that day. Now it was about the tenth hour. One of these two, who heard John speak and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, We have found the Messiah, which is translated the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, he said, You are Simon, the son of Jonah.

You shall be called Cephas, which is translated a stone. Now obviously, on this earlier occasion, both Andrew and Peter and some other disciple, whose name is not given, met Jesus and spent the day with Jesus. However, we do not read in John's Gospel that Jesus called them to follow him on that occasion.

After all, it would not be a given that just because someone is impressed with Jesus that they would leave their job and go off following him when he had never given any such command to do so. It is later that they meet him at the sea here, and he actually says, Follow me, and they're ready to go. But that's because they had met him before.

They knew he was the Messiah. They believed at least he was the Messiah at that point. And they were very impressed with him.

In fact, they probably longed to spend more time with him. And so when he arrived on

the scene and told them to follow him, they were ready to go. By the way, who was that other man? In the Gospel there of John, it says that two disciples of John followed Jesus, and one of them was Andrew.

And then we read that Andrew had gone and gotten his brother, Peter. But who was the other disciple of John that was with Andrew originally? Well, almost certainly it was John himself. The reason for thinking so is that in John's Gospel he never names himself.

He refers to himself sometimes as that other disciple or by some other designation, but he never names himself by name. And therefore, Andrew was probably with John originally. And John is, of course, one of these fishermen too.

We find that at least three of these fishermen met Jesus on this earlier occasion, and now they meet him again. And he says, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. And they come after him.

It's interesting that he said to them, I will make you fishers of men, because they were fishermen. And it would give them the impression that he was going to call them to something that they had some aptitude for. Suppose he had said to them, to these fishermen, follow me and I will make you the founders of a great worldwide religion.

You'll be great biblical expositors and provide spiritual guidance for multitudes for the rest of history. Well, that would have been true, but they probably would have been very intimidated. These were uneducated laborers.

These were fishermen. For Jesus to tell them that he wanted them to found a worldwide religion or to become spiritual teachers or exposition experts of the scripture, I'm sure they would have felt totally inadequate to do so. So he simply put it this way.

Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men. In other words, you know how to fish. Fishing is something that is not intimidating to you.

We'll just redirect your efforts so that you'll be fishing for men instead of for fish. Well, that didn't sound familiar, but it didn't sound altogether unfamiliar either. Apparently, the techniques that they knew as fishermen somehow could be applied to what they would be doing next.

It was only after some years and after some training that they began to become fully aware of their mission to be missionaries, really, and church leaders. But when Jesus said they would be fishers of men, he was really appealing to them at a level of familiarity with their work. It's not the only time I've ever heard of Jesus calling someone from a vocation and calling them into a vocation that had some similarity to it.

In fact, when I was younger, I used to teach the Bible part-time rather than full-time as I do now, and I used to support myself part-time as a window cleaner. And I just took great

delight in getting people's windows clean. I really did.

In fact, on my business card, I had a verse quoted from 1 Corinthians 13 from the King James Version, which says, for now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. And I realized that what I enjoyed about washing windows was that dirty windows obscure vision and prevent light from coming through as brilliantly. And what I really love to do is to help to illuminate.

I really love to help make things clearer. And that's what I try to do as a teacher as well. I knew another man who was an automobile mechanic, and he was called into full-time ministry.

And it turned out that his ministry was very much of a troubleshooting in the church chemistry, sort of working out problems in the operations of the church. He wasn't a teacher who did the same kind of thing I do, but he had a different kind of ministry like that. Another man I knew actually was a concrete mason, and he was called into ministry.

He's still for many years been in ministry. In fact, he's written several books now and all. But his ministry, though, he's quite knowledgeable in the Word and quite capable of teaching.

He is focusing almost entirely on evangelism and on laying foundations for new believers, training new Christians. And here, before he was in the ministry, he was laying actual concrete foundations, and now God's got him laying spiritual foundations. Now, I may be reading too much into this, but I couldn't help but notice these kinds of things.

Sometimes people who would otherwise be considered unqualified for religious service, what they already know something about provides some motivation and some foundation for the actual spiritual work they're going to be in. And this was the case with the fishermen. And they were motivated to catch fish.

They knew how to do it. And now Jesus said, well, I'm going to make you fishermen of another sort. You're going to be catching men.

And so they left their nets and followed. Now, this story is very much abbreviated in Matthew. It's also found over in Luke chapter 5, and there's considerable more detail.

As it turns out, when Jesus came to where these men were cleaning their nets, he actually preached to multitudes on the beach there. And, in fact, the multitudes were so numerous and crowding him so much that he asked Peter to use his boat as a pulpit and to shove off offshore a little bit so Jesus could stand on the boat out in the water so people wouldn't be crowding him. And this all happened before Jesus called these men to follow him.

And after the crowds were sent away, according to Luke, Jesus told the disciples to put their net over the side of the boat to get some fish. And Peter protested that they'd been fishing all night and they'd caught nothing. But he said, at your word, we'll go ahead and do it.

So he did. And, of course, a great catch of fish came up. It was absolutely miraculous.

And Peter recognized this. And according to Luke's gospel, Peter fell down in front of Jesus and said, depart from me, Lord. I'm a sinful man.

And Jesus said, do not fear. From henceforth you will catch men, which is basically Luke's way of rendering this statement. I will make you fishers of men.

So the story has more detail in Luke than it has here. But the important thing is that these four men were called to follow Jesus on a permanent basis. They had known him before.

They had even believed him to be the Messiah before. But now they were called away from their other vocations into full-time ministry. And many of my listeners may be like the disciples were before this call came to them.

You may have become a committed Christian. You believe that Jesus is your Savior. He's the Christ.

He's your Lord. And maybe you're even chomping at the bit to serve him in some way. But you must continue to work in the labor that you're doing until such a time as a call to full-time service comes.

We cannot call ourselves. As it says in Hebrews, the high priest did not take that honor on himself, but he that called him was God. Likewise, to be called into the ministry is something that God reserves the right to do.

And he does call certain people into ministry, but they have to be faithful and diligent in the work they're doing first. Consider Jesus himself. Jesus lived to be about 33 years old.

His mission was to save the world and to start a movement and to train the leaders of that movement. Now, he only had 33 years total and when he turned 30 years old, he was still not doing the work yet. What was he doing? Throughout his young manhood, until he was about 30, he was working in a carpenter shop.

Can you imagine how frustrating it could have been to him knowing how much work had to be done and how little time he had and wondering how many days he would have to wait in that carpenter shop doing things that seem so inconsequential, shaving another table leg or something like that, while he knew that there were multitudes perishing and that there was a kingdom to establish and that there were disciples to call and to train

and that he would be cut short in the middle of his days. And here he is, 18, 19, 20, 25, 27, 28 years old, 29 years old, and he's still working at this mundane job, and yet he's the savior of the world. And yet the call came when he was 30 years old and Jesus accomplished in three and a half years as much as God wanted him to accomplish.

But think of if you had a mission as important as Jesus's or even half as important, that was of a spiritual nature, and you found yourself working at some job that seemed to you so inconsequential. Think of the impatience you'd be tempted to have to wait to be called, and yet if Jesus had launched himself into ministry prematurely, or if the disciples had, it would have not been the will of God, and they would have not been fruitful. God's timing is best, and Jesus had known these men for some months, but had not called them to leave their jobs until this time.

But when he did, they were called to follow him full-time, and from that day on they were not to be fishermen anymore. Now how would they live? How would their families be fed? Jesus didn't explain that to them. Notice he didn't say, follow me, give up your fishing, become a fisherman, and I will guarantee you a salary.

I will guarantee you a fit wage. Jesus didn't pay them anything. He didn't have money himself.

We read elsewhere in Luke chapter 8, I believe it is, that Jesus and his disciples were supported by the free will offerings of certain women and others that appreciated their ministry and put them up. They were housed by the hospitality of people who appreciated their ministry, but it's quite clear that Jesus didn't pay a salary to his disciples, nor was Jesus himself receiving a salary. They were living by faith.

They were doing the will of God. They had to leave their jobs because Jesus told them to. But how would they pay their bills? Well, if you obey Jesus, you have to leave those problems to him.

And that's what the disciples did, and they never lacked anything. On one occasion, later in Matthew 19, Peter said to Jesus, Lord, we've left everything. What shall we have in return? And Jesus said, those of you who've left houses and lands and mothers and fathers and wives and children for my sake will have a hundredfold more, both in this life and in the life to come.

He didn't mean that they would get rich. He simply meant that in the time that they would serve him, they'd have many, many times more than what they had given up, provided for them as they needed it. Houses, lands, whatever they needed, food, family, they had it all provided for them for the rest of their lives, but not on a guaranteed basis.

We never read in the scripture of any minister of the gospel having guaranteed income. Now, am I saying it's wrong for a minister of the gospel to have guaranteed income? I

can't say that. Though Jesus, when he sent his disciples out, he said, freely you have received, freely give, which, you know, I mean, if you give freely, then you're not charging for it.

And thus the gospel was spread, not by mercenaries and not by people who were career men who were doing it professionally to make a living and who were motivated by all those same motivations that motivate people in professional vocations outside the church, but these were men who were serving God by faith. They were serving God because it mattered more to them than their carnal security. And they trusted God, and God never failed them.

And that is how some people still minister today. It's not as common as it used to be in the first century, but it is still possible to do. I've been doing that for many years myself, and I want to encourage anyone there listening who feels called to the ministry but doesn't know how they'll be supported that God is faithful, God provides.

And he provided for these men, although they were called away from their nets, and they were called away from their vocation, and they never again had the opportunity to go out and make a living in the normal fashion, yet we have no reason to believe they ever lacked any good thing. And in the years, not only that they were with Jesus, but later on in the church, though these men never became rich, remember Peter saying to the beggar at the gate, silver and gold I have none, but such as I have give I thee. Well, he didn't have any silver or gold of his own, but everything the church had was at his disposal, and he never lacked anything, and neither did the others.

So these men were called to a faith venture. They were called to serve God, to seek first the kingdom of God, to not worry about food and clothing and such things, and to see that God would add all these things unto them. And it never really becomes an issue later in their lives, this whole issue.

We never read of them struggling with financial worries or anything because they've left their jobs. It just wasn't a need to worry because they were with Jesus, and Jesus was dictating to them what to do, and of course his Father who provided for him also would provide for them. Now, verse 23 says, Now Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Then his fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon possessed, epileptics and paralytics, and he healed them all. And great multitudes followed him from Galilee and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond Jordan. Now here we simply read of Jesus' ministry taking off.

He was obscure for possibly the first year of his ministry, but now that he called his

disciples, some of them he would call more later, he was beginning his movement in earnest. He was beginning to show those who would be the leaders of the church, the apostles, how it was done. He's beginning to train them in ministry, and much of his ministry had to do with the miraculous.

He healed sick people. He cast demons out of people. In time they would see him raise the dead and do many other things.

People of all kinds of sickness came to him, and because he healed them, of course, his reputation spread tremendously. We're told that the people came to him from Galilee, okay, that's the region he was in, and from Decapolis. Now Decapolis were 10 cities that were on the other side of Jordan, outside of Jewish territory, and there were Jewish people in those cities who heard of Jesus and came to get healed and to bring their sick.

People came from Jerusalem, which was the other end of the country, and Judea, and even beyond the Jordan, which is a region called Perea. So throughout the entire country of Israel, plus all the regions on the other side of the Jordan, which is outside the country, people were coming in droves. At some point later on, Jesus had, it would appear, as many as 15,000 people following him around.

It was a huge movement. Now Jesus did not encourage people to come to him simply to be healed. He did not fail to heal them, because when he saw them, he said they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he had compassion on them, and he healed their sickness.

But whenever Jesus healed people, or at least most of the time, he typically told them not to talk it up, not to go and tell people about it, because Jesus was not trying to gather a huge crowd by the reports of the miraculous. These days, if an evangelist or a minister has some success in seeing people healed, that becomes a sort of a calling card on his publicity. People want to come to healing evangelists.

It's going to be a healing revival, and healing is really played up in modern evangelism, especially where it's going to be found that some healing guy is going to come and pray for people, and great crowds are drawn by this desire to be healed. Jesus, however, had a very different spirit about him. He would heal people, but he didn't want to play up the fact that he was healing people, and he usually didn't want them to spread it around that he was doing so.

Why? I believe that Jesus wanted people to come to him for the right reasons, not just because they were sick and wanted to be relieved. Anyone, wicked or good, could desire to be relieved of sickness. I think Jesus wanted people to come to him who had a hunger for the things of God, who were desirous to participate in the kingdom of God.

Healing was one of the byproducts of the coming of the kingdom of God, one of the



fringe benefits, but he did not want people to come because of healing. I believe Jesus wanted them to come because of God stirring their heart to seek and hunger after righteousness and after the kingdom of God. And as they would seek the kingdom of God, all other necessary things would be provided for them, including their healing, when that was God's will for them.

We'll continue talking about the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew next time. We've run out of time for today's session. I hope you'll be able to join us next time because we come to chapter five, where we begin the Sermon on the Mount, certainly one of the most interesting and important passages in the New Testament.

The teaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount is very important. Please join us.